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## VOV-KULAK.

A SMALL, low-roofed, stifling room, from the rough-hewn log-walls of which the plaster of clay and dried leaves which serves it as mortar peeps in long parallel lines up to the very roof; a huge tiled stove, with its invariable 'bed-place' on the top; an enormous prairie of a bed, recalling Sergeant Kite's description of the 'bed of honour, in which ten thousand men might lie and never feel each other;' a little oil-lamp, throwing into strong relief the wolf's head that grins on the wall, the gilt-edged picture of the saint in the farther corner, and the rough, bearded, low-browed faces of the four men who are supping cabbage-soup with little wooden ladles out of the immense pine-wood bowl on the rickety table; a little, square, double-window, through which the great waste of snow without, half-seen by the fitful gleams of moonlight that shimmer through the driving clouds, appears and vanishes like a nightmare. Such is the scene at which I find myself assisting, one bitter December night, amid the boundless solitudes of the Don. Strictly speaking, a Cossack village (or indeed a Russian village of any kind) can scarcely be pronounced a desirable residence, thanks to the presence of various unregistered tenants, who exact rent instead of paying it; but my travels in snake-breeding Arabia and cockroach-haunted Egypt, among the scorpions of Syria and the tarantulas of the Greek Archipelago, had long since case-hardened me to such phenomena; and on a blustering winter night, with the thermometer below zero Fahrenheit, and a genuine Russian storm burying the roads fathom-deep in drifting snow, shelter is worth having, even when attended by the risk of seeing a cockroach take a header into your glass from the ceiling, or finding a grand parade of what Mark Tapley would call 'wampires' going on in your coat-pocket.

It seems to be the fashion nowadays for every tourist who has happened to deviate fifty miles from the beaten track to proclaim the feat, as if he were Bruce and Livingstone in one, and to hold up his 'new route' for the adoration of all

true believers in Murray and Bradshaw. Among such by-ways of travel, the line of the Don merits a higher place than it has yet attained. All the great rivers of Russia are more or less desolate; but the desolation of the Don is unique. The loneliness of the Volga, the Dnieper, the Dniester, is that of an old world deserted; the loneliness of the Don is that of a new world still unpeopled. Towards sunset, especially, the aspect of the whole landscape becomes wild and dreary to the last degree. The red light fading slowly over the vast treeless plain; the gathering shadows stealing over the sandy shores and long low islets, till all is wrapped in ghostly dimness; the dead, grim silence, broken only by the plash and welter of the sullen waters, or the long, shrill, melancholy cry of some passing bird—all produce an effect impossible to describe.

And what a study is the Cossack himself! perhaps the most picturesque of all the barbaric waifs and strays which the ebb of the fifteenth century has stranded upon the shores of the nineteenth. Those who have seen him only as the tamed loungeur of great cities, tending horses or opening doors in Moscow and St Petersburg, can hardly conceive him as he appears in his native deserts, embracing his comrade one minute, and knocking him down the next—now snoring for hours on the top of his stove, wrapped in a greasy sheepskin, and now rushing over the steppe like a hurricane, with his shaggy hair streaming in the wind, and his small, deep-set, glittering eyes glancing restlessly from side to side like those of a bird of prey—a magnificent relic of the men who were the scourge of Poland and Crim-Tartary, in the grim old days when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and wrong in those of every one else.

Among these men I had been domiciled for weeks, and had enjoyed, with the keen relish of one tasting a little plain, wholesome barbarism after a long surfeit of civilisation, their wild war-songs and barbaric dances, their hot fights and boisterous merry-makings, their quaint old-world traditions, and even their recent tossing of myself on high, as a special honour, in imitation of the

old custom of raising their chief on a shield after his election. Whenever I entered a Cossack hut, I looked, as a matter of course, for an abundance of good songs and racy stories, plenty of rough good-humoured banter, a little boyish horse-play, and an untiring flow of fun and jollity. But on this particular evening, I am not ten minutes in the company of my four *convives* without seeing that there is something wrong. After the first greeting, the whole four are utterly silent; and to me, who know how these rough, jovial, overgrown children shout, and chaff, and push each other about, and laugh from mere fullness of high spirits, this unwonted silence has in it something grim and portentous. From time to time I notice them eyeing each other furtively, as if awaiting the mention of a subject which no one liked to be the first to introduce. At length I ventured to give an impetus to the conversation myself.

'Well, brothers, how are the wolves behaving down here this winter?'

The question is a natural one at this place and season, and, to such born sportsmen as these, ought to be specially acceptable; but had I proposed the immediate assassination of the emperor, my hearers could hardly seem more astounded and dismayed.

'They're behaving well enough, master,'\* says one of the younger men at length, with an air of such extreme frankness that I feel sure he is lying. 'They must be keeping Christmas at home, we see so little of them.'

'Ach, Alexey Stepanovitch, won't there be a lighted match on your tongue for that!' breaks in a grizzled old fellow beside him. 'If God is angry with us, can we mend the matter by telling lies about it? If the Pan Anglitchanin [Master Englishman] stays with us another day or two, he'll see enough of how the wolves are behaving.'

And then, as if this frank avowal had fairly broken the ice, one dismal story began to trickle out after another.

'Look at Ostap the woodman, last week—not enough of him left to feed a hen!'

'And Stepan Kostenko's† cow killed; and Dmitri Mardliako's two dogs eaten t'other day!'

'And Father Arkadi's horse gobbled upon the Novo-Donetz road; and he half-frozen by having to stick in a tree for safety, till the commissioner came by in his sledge and took him down!'

'But,' remark I at length, 'are *your* hands numbed, then, that you let them ravage this way, without warming their porridge for them? Surely four Cossacks are a match for a dozen wolves any day.'

Young Alexey's eyes flash fire at this taunt, and he opens his mouth to reply. For a moment, I hope that the reproach may pique him into divulging the mystery which has begun to provoke me; but before he can speak, the old graybeard lifts his hand in a gesture of warning. 'Listen!' says he, under his breath.

We rise to our feet, and stand listening in silence. The old Cossack 'khootor' (farm-house) in which we now are is a fair specimen of its kind. In the centre is a vast square cattle-yard, flanked

on two sides by the kitchens and sleeping apartments of the community, and the stables and cow-houses; while the other two sides of the square are formed by wood-sheds, store-rooms, wash-houses, &c. The whole structure is surrounded by an enormous palisade, entered by a gate of equal height; and in the eastern angle of it, commanding a full view of the great waste of snow outside, is the room in which we are now standing. The clouds are still hurrying across the sky as wildly as ever, and all without looks dim and spectral; but the roar of the wind hulls for a moment, and in that dead pause there comes from the far distance a long, weird, dismal howl.

'One might think,' says the old man in a hoarse whisper, 'that those are not wolves, but howlers of another kind.'

The last words, and still more the tone in which they are uttered, impress me with a creeping horror, which I can neither explain nor shake off; and the next moment the deep voice of my host, speaking for the first time, breaks in with words even more ominous: 'It's time for you to go and watch, my lads, and I'll do the same. Remember to cross yourselves and say a prayer, one and all; we need it when *they* are about.'

The men nod, and file out into the darkness like a train of spectres. As soon as we are left alone, my host rises and confronts me, with a kind of stern gladness in his eyes, like a brave man on the brink of some desperate adventure.

'Pan Anglitchanin,' says he, looking me full in the face, 'you are a Christian and a brave man, and I can say to you what I could not say to those lads yonder. They're stout fellows, as ever were; but against anything that they don't understand, they're like reeds in a spring flood. You are the man I want. The devil is abroad among us just now; will you stand by me against him?'

I look at the man in mute wonder. There is a kind of exaltation (no other word will express it) in his look and manner, which, for the moment, transfigures and almost glorifies him; but it is not the excitement either of delirium or of intoxication. Whatever his purpose might be, it is plain that he has it clearly before him.

'What do you want me to do, then?' ask I.

'I want you to come with me to-morrow night,' answers my host in a stern whisper, 'and to keep watch for such game as you have never yet fired at in all your travels. Will you do it?'

'Come, that sounds interesting; why not try it to-night?'

Tchistarenko answers merely by pointing through the window; but one glance in that direction suffices. In that storm no man could live for half an hour; and its fury seemed to be increasing.

'To-morrow be it, then,' respond I. 'But what's this wonderful game that you're going to introduce me to?'

'Listen!' replies the Cossack solemnly. 'You English hear of strange things in your travels—did you ever hear of a "Vov-kulak"?''

I give an involuntary start. Dimly, like a half-forgotten dream, there comes back to me at the sound of that name a weird image of undefined horror; but it is in vain that I strive to attach any distinct shape to it.

'It's the name we give to transformed men,' explains my host, noticing my puzzled look; 'those to whom Satan gives power to take the shape of

\* This is perhaps the best rendering of the untranslatable 'Pan,' retained from the Poles by the Cossacks, and including all titles from Mr to Your Grace.

† The Cossack names differ from the Russian in the termination 'ko,' instead of 'off' or 'in.'

wolves or other wild beasts, and in that form to work mischief to those whom they hate. These ill deeds that our lads were telling of just now, do you think they were the work of common wolves? If they were, I should not fear them. They are the work of the Vov-kulak!

The terrible earnestness of the man's tone and manner impress me in my own despite; and I start unconsciously as another long dreary howl from without comes floating amid the roar of the storm.

'It is not only that they devour horses and cattle,' he continues, 'but they will assail Christian men—ay, and kill them! Father Arkadi, now, the other day—do you think any common wolf would have hunted *him* like that? He is a holy man, and therefore the servants of the devil hate him. But here's the difficulty—that it is only as wolves that these brutes can be hurt or slain; for in their human shape no one can recognise them. But what am I doing to tire you with this long story, when the most famous of the Vov-kulaks is an Englishman himself?'

'How's that?' ask I, staring.

'Why, is it not so?' asks the Cossack, looking at me with an air of surprise. 'Feodor Nikeltin, the courier, who came through our village from Peter [St Petersburg] the other day, told us of a famous Englishman, Dr Davidovitch Livenshton, who had the power of changing himself into a lion, and in that shape went all over Africa, and fought with another lion, and killed him, but got his own arm broken in the fight; and how at last the black sorcerers, whose magic was stronger than his, took him prisoner; and how the empress of England is now sending out an army to rescue him.'

This matchlessly characteristic version of Dr Livingstone's career almost overcomes my gravity, in spite of the grim solemnity of the narrator; but the next words make me serious enough.

'Pan Anglitchanin! would your heart be firm to take a man's life, if you knew him to be an evil-doer and a servant of Satan?'

'I would not willingly shed blood,' answer I; 'but if it had to be done, I'd do it!'

'Listen, then!' says Tchistarenko, in a stern whisper. 'You were at Ligoovo the other day—did you see Ostap Goorko, the rich corn-dealer, there?'

'No; the day that I was there he was from home.'

The terrible change that comes over the Cossack's face at my answer, cannot be conveyed in words.

'He was from home—and I *know where!* If it please God, his time is come,' says Tchistarenko, with the stern triumph of a Puritan cuirassier about to charge the 'godless horsemen' of Lunsford and Goring.

'Why, Zacharr Timopheievitch,' ask I, fairly puzzled, 'what on earth has Goorko to do with these man-wolves of yours?'

'Haven't you guessed it, then? Ostap Goorko is the Vov-kulak!'

The day which followed the strange revelation narrated above, gave me an opportunity of observing what always interests me in the highest degree—the demeanour of a brave man about to encounter a deadly peril. I have myself, in the course of an adventurous life, had my nerves tried by every kind of pressure. I have gone

bird's-nesting on the worst precipices of the Arctic Sea, and waited twenty minutes in a dentist's ante-room; I have walked unarmed and alone through a mob of Arab fanatics, and been examined for classical honours at Oxford; but I question very much whether, in all that constitutes true courage, this rude, untravelling, ignorant semi-savage with whom I found myself so strangely associated, was not far my superior. We Western Europeans, enlightened to the verge of scepticism, with the weird shadows of medieval superstition lying ages behind us, naturally find it hard to see any heroism in confronting an imaginary peril; but, looked at from his own point of view, the risk which Tchistarenko was about to run might have put to shame many a feat that has earned its place in history. According to his own belief, he was about to do battle with a monster of preternatural strength and ferocity, gifted with unlimited capacities of evil, and supported by the manifest power of Satan himself; yet he was ready to go forth against it, and fight with it, even to his own destruction, if only he might 'save those of his village from harm.' 'This is a man worth knowing,' thought I to myself, as I looked at the Cossack's set lips and knitted brow, and tried to imagine his feelings at the prospect of what lay before him.

All that day Tchistarenko was very quiet—going through his ordinary work as methodically as ever, but still wearing a thoughtful, somewhat stern look, as of one upon whose mind grave interests are weighing. It was characteristic of the man that he never thought of asking whether I still intended to accompany him—feeling certain that, having once undertaken the adventure, I could have no thought of drawing back. Nor, indeed, had I; but, despite my utter disbelief in the mythical 'Vov-kulak,' I began to feel strangely excited towards evening, as though the contagion of Tchistarenko's grim superstition had infected me in spite of myself. Far down in the secret soul of the hardest and most practical man alive, (deny it as he will), there is still a hidden fund of superstition, a lurking sympathy with the unseen and unknown; and many of the strangest anomalies recorded in history are traceable to the sudden awakening of this feeling after years of torpor. It was not without a secret thrill that, turning round from the window, through which I had been reconnoitring the state of the snow, I saw my companion take down his long gun, and begin to load it.

'Surely it's not time to start yet, Zacharr Timopheievitch!'

'Not for three hours and more—but I like to have all ready.'

We relapsed into silence. The pale gray light of the short winter day was dying away from the great waste outside, and a ghostly dimness began to creep over it. Night drew on—cold, dreary, dismal: an utter desolation, an immense silence, as if the world itself were dead, and only we two kept living, living on. And there was something in this blank, overwhelming stillness infinitely more weird and ghastly than all the uproar of the preceding night.

'Our game will be abroad to-night, never fear,' said Tchistarenko, in a hoarse whisper. 'Folks say the devil loves a storm—but that is not true; it is when all is calm, and men are not expecting him, that he pounces upon them!'

Our evening meal was despatched in utter silence; and the moment we had finished, the Cossack stuck his knife in his belt, slung his gun over his shoulders, bowed his head toward the little picture of his patron saint with a few muttered words of fervent prayer; and then, turning to me, said simply: 'I am ready!'

We sallied forth in silence. By this time it was so dark that I had to grope my way; but to the unerring instincts of my companion, night and day were alike. Bidding me keep fast hold of his shoulder-strap, he went on swiftly and surely as a bloodhound, through the silent village. Ever and anon, a gleam of light from the windows of a hut flashed into momentary relief the skeleton limbs of frozen trees starting up from the snow, and huge drifts hanging over us as if already toppling to crush us in their fall; and the utter silence and desolation of this dreary march through the darkness, the grim taciturnity of my guide, the mysterious horror of the work that lay before us, began to weigh upon me like a nightmare. At length, as we left the last hut behind us, and reached the border of the vast trackless waste beyond, a pale shadowy gleam, struggling through the great mass of blackness that lowered overhead, betokened the rising of the moon.

'See!' cried the devout Russian, in a tone of stern triumph, 'God has lit His candle for us, that we may overthrow the spirits of darkness! Now, Pan, this is the place; you get behind that stone, and I'll get behind this one; and then let it be as God wills! This is an accursed place, and the evil creature will be sure to pass through it.'

I looked round with a start of sudden recognition, and could not but admire the stubborn bravery which had prompted this iron man to select deliberately for his place of ambush a spot which must have been more terrible to him than a battery. It was a deep gully, or rather fosse, barely wide enough for two men to walk abreast, and flanked by two enormous boulders about five paces apart—one half upright, the other flat on the ground—and both bearing a strange, goblin resemblance to the human shape, which was hideously exaggerated by the fitful moonlight. According to a weird popular legend, which I had already heard from the lips of a village patriarch, the recumbent block was the transformed figure of a traveller lost in the snow, whose cries had attracted to the spot a passing woodman; but the latter, instead of lending any assistance, was just about to murder and rifle the helpless man, when the vengeance of Heaven terminated his own life, and left him to be an enduring monument of divine retribution. The peculiar attitude of the two masses—the one lying prostrate, the other apparently straining toward it—is still appealed to by the peasantry in confirmation of the dismal story; and a bribe of fifty roubles would not embolden the bravest man in the province to approach the fatal spot after nightfall. Here, therefore (as if in order that no element of horror might be wanting to this fearful melodrama), we took up our post; and, cowering behind the fatal boulders, awaited in grim silence the coming of our mysterious enemy.

Weary, weary work, crouched on the snow, in cold and darkness, with the bitter night-air creeping like a palsy through one's cramped limbs, and ear and eye alike strained to the utmost, all in

vain. Ten times over, in the course of that dreary vigil, I seem to hear the distant howl and patting feet of our awful visitant; or to see its yellow, murderous eyes gleaming through the ghostly semi-darkness that encompasses me. To these succeed other and wilder visions. The grim, half-human figure, in whose shadow I crouch, seems to writhe and struggle in agony: its gaunt companion rises erect, and strides forward, with uplifted arm, to act again the deed of murder. I see the savage grin of the one, the imploring anguish of the other; and the horrible fancy that my comrade is dead, or paralysed, and that I am virtually alone with the living dead, pulses through me like an electric shock. Hark! what sound is that which comes moaning over the great waste? And there, again and again; and now clear, and loud, and unmistakable! Not the long, dreary wail of the prowling wolf, in his unsatisfied hunger; but a short, sharp, snarling cry—the cry of a wild beast in full sight of its prey, and just about to seize it.

'Ready, Pan Anglitchanin; he's coming!'

At the sound of that firm, manly voice, at the actual presence of the long-expected danger, my nerves are steelled once more. I cock my revolver, and peer warily round the edge of the rock. Far out on the great waste of snow, I see, in the shimmering light of the half-clouded moon, a dim, gray shadow gliding toward me, swiftly and silently, like a spirit of evil. Nearer and nearer it comes, till I can see the long, narrow, cruel head, the fierce yellow eye, the tongue lolling out from between the sharp white fangs. A moment's pause on the ridge above me, bringing its gaunt figure into hideous relief against the sky, and then down it shoots into the gully, right past the spot where I lie hid. Crack goes my revolver, and a sharp howl of pain shews that the shot has told; but before I can fire again, the loud bang of Tchistarenko's gun answers from the right; and then a snarling, worrying noise, which I know only too well. I sprang toward the sound; but at that moment a cloud overcast the moon, and I could barely distinguish a confused heap of man and beast struggling in a whirl of spraying snow, and so mingled together that I dared not strike, for fear of killing my friend. As I stood hesitating, a hand suddenly emerged from the shapeless mass: there was a steely gleam in the shadowy moonlight; a dull 'plug' twice repeated, like the sound of a spade struck into soft earth; and Tchistarenko sprang to his feet, with a long deep gasp, like the first breath of a returned diver. At the same moment, the moon burst forth again in all its splendour, lighting up a scene worthy of Fuseli. Over a background of unending snow, dim and spectral as a nightmare, the two great rocks rose gauntly up in the moonlight, casting shadows more grim and goblin than themselves. Below, the black gully yawned like the mouth of a grave; but on the crest of the great drift above it, in the full glory of the moonlight, lay a huge gray wolf, stark and dead, its mighty jaws gaping wide with the gasp of its last agony; and over it stood Tchistarenko, dripping blood from a fearful wound in his shoulder, but with a light of stern triumph on his iron face which I shall never forget.

'God be thanked, Pan, who delivered him into our hands! See, your ball has broken his right fore-paw, and mine has gone through his neck.



I'll just put the sign of the cross on him, and then we can go in peace: he'll do no more harm after that.'

He gashed the wolf's side crosswise as he spoke; and, without even stopping to bandage his own hurt, set off homeward at such a pace that I had some difficulty in keeping up with him. By a singular coincidence, the death of Goorko, the suspected were-wolf, took place that very night; and on my return a few months later, I found Tchistarenko's fame established throughout the entire province, as the deliverer of his people from the fury of the Vov-kulak.

## FROM CAMBODIA TO CHINA.

### IN TWO PARTS.—PART II.

CHINA! The word alone awakens the idea of a people who have triumphed over space by the extent of their empire, and over time by their duration; unchangeable in their customs as in their maxims, and opposing to the course of events and ideas a kind of colossal petrification. China has been beforehand with Europe in its social life, in science, and in art, but its most useful inventions have remained sterile, as if this early race had passed into a decrepitude without remedy. Into this country the French explorers entered, not by its accessible shore, and into the splendid hotels of Shang-hai, but eight hundred leagues distant, without money, shoes, and scarcely clothes, yet determined, by the help of their letters, signed by the regent of the empire, to make the mandarins insure their safety and respect their persons.

An immense crowd followed them into the first town, that of Muong-long, where a mandarin accompanied by soldiers made way for them to the pagoda where they were to lodge. Rice and pork were set before them, and sentinels stationed to keep the very troublesome and inquisitive people away. An old priest and two priestesses suffice for the care of the sanctuary, which is no longer disfigured by the image of Buddha. Their duties are very simple—to keep a lamp burning before a female figure, and to fill three small boxes with incense. A few prostrations and some pious reading on certain days, are all the outward appearance of worship in the temples of the philosophical Confucius. The old women seemed happy, and were delighted to receive a small fee with which to buy coffins. In China, it is a luxury to have your last home made long before death; a coffin costs a large sum, especially if it bear the name of a celebrated maker.

A visit was paid on the following day to the governor, who awaited them in a hall approached through three courts, attired in the classical Chinese costume: a furred surplice, long silk robe, and magnificent tail; his cap had the coral button which marked him as belonging to the military, and not the literary order, an inferiority in the eyes of that nation. He spoke little, smoked his pipe, and tried to keep up an attitude of dignity, until M. de Lagrée offered him a revolver, when his eyes sparkled, he jumped off his seat, and fired off the

six balls one after another, without caring for the crowd around; happily, his attendants turned his arm, so that no one was hurt. He manifested much anxiety as to the safety of the strangers, told them that the whole of the western province where the Mekong flows had been invaded by the Mussulmans, and was a prey to the horrors of war. Owing to these representations, it was determined to abandon that stream, which they had followed for twelve hundred miles, and explore the zone watered by the Sonkoi, which empties itself into the sea in the Bay of Tonkin.

Arrangements having been made, they started under the escort of an inferior mandarin, wearing a large straw-hat falling over his shoulders, a sort of Sancho Panza on horseback, effeminately seated in the midst of cushions. As for the unfortunate Frenchmen, they were not rich enough to ride. Before them were carried several red banners; behind, were the soldiers, some having a lance, others a gun, which they occasionally fired, to frighten away an enemy which never appeared. But the country was desolated with war, the villages in ruins, and the people struggling for the last three years against despair and misery; the roads neglected, the bridges falling, and a desert filled with heaps of ruins. There was nothing tropical in the landscape, which was stern and wild, mountains at a distance hiding their heads in the clouds, and large pine-forests. The mineral riches in these hills of Yun-nan have long been celebrated; iron is abundant, and gold is also found; but the desire of the government is to repress the gold-fever, and the search for it is forbidden.

By degrees the traces of war disappeared, villages were seen, but provisions were still at a high price. If the travellers had been obliged to buy, they would soon have given in, but owing to the good understanding with the authorities, everything was presented to them, and a home found in the pagodas. On one occasion, a porter refused to carry his allotted burden; they discovered that he had found an opportunity of smoking his opium-pipe when hidden behind a mat. When his burden was placed on his back, he staggered like a drunken man, and refused to move; menaces were indifferent to him, blows made him groan, but nothing could tear him from his indifference. There is no plague that has ever existed in the world so terrible as opium-smoking. The spirits introduced among the Indians by Europeans, the pestilence which ravages countries, cannot be compared to it. It possesses an invincible attraction; the poorest beggar will smoke rather than eat, and once the habit is begun, it is rarely conquered. Many Chinese came to the travellers to ask for a remedy against the temptation, to which they daily succumbed, even whilst cursing it.

Having reached the large town of Yun-nan-sen, they received an invitation on red paper to dine with the general, Ma-tagen, commander-in-chief of the imperial troops. The place was threatened by the enemy, the merchants were hurrying to hide

their goods among the mountains, whilst the villagers were coming within the walls for a shelter. Dressing in the few relics left them, they went to the general's *yamen*. He was seated at a chess-table, from which he scarcely rose to receive them, but sent one of his friends to take them into a small drawing-room, where tea was served. Chinese paintings, lanterns from Canton, and many ornaments adorned the rooms, which were elegantly furnished; the courts were filled with bundles of lances, and the corridors with sacks of bullets; there was an abundance of European arms: double-barrelled guns, revolvers, and pistols of all kinds. Ma-tagen is a character; he seizes on the taxes, and spends enormous sums on his private luxuries; he practises shooting for days together—the walls, columns, and pictures are all punctured; the back of a chair had received twenty balls, and his servants even are sometimes used as targets. He is covered with wounds, and likes to shew the scars. Sitting down to dinner, they had a complete dessert handed to them, pines, oranges, and other fruits. It is the exact reverse of our arrangements; for, during three hours, these were succeeded by the strangest meats; birds' nests, worms of all kinds, fishes, entrails, lichens—such were some of the simplest dishes, minced meat in immense variety, and soup at the end. Each drank large quantities of hot tea, moistened the lips with rice-wine, and dried their fingers on pieces of paper instead of napkins.

Another celebrated person, whose assistance might be of use to them, was a venerated priest, who professed to live in the midst of his telescopes and maps, though intrigue and vanity had glided through the fissures of his brain. Twice they presented themselves at his gate, but were repulsed, as he was at prayers. At last, wishing to know the exact distance between the earth and the sun, to be fixed by the time it would take a bird to go from Yun-nan to the moon—such were the terms of his question—he admitted them. He was a little old man, with eyes almost extinct, so deep were the cavities; and wrinkles which formed a number of singular designs on his forehead. A long conversation was carried on about geography, and, to his great delight, they could teach him how to use a telescope, which had cost a large sum at Peking. An Englishman whom he had consulted had called him an ass, which was a great offence; but he offered to do anything for his visitors. 'I see,' said he, 'that you travel exclusively for instruction, as I do, but be assured that you will find every one a blockhead in this land but myself. My authority is equally respected by Mussulmans, imperialists, and rebels, and with a word from me you can pass through the country without fear.' Not only did they receive this letter, but the general, Ma-tagen, willingly advanced them between two and three hundred pounds to help them on their journey.

The city of Yun-nan-sen is in the form of a square, walled in, and a canal flows round; outside are the remains of a larger city, which was the centre of commerce, now wholly destroyed by war. The misery of the people is great; black dried-up beggars, with scarcely a rag to cover them, truly living skeletons, wander about the streets imploring aid. One large family were obliged to live in a cavern with no other clothing than the very slight kind of paper made of mulberry leaves. The venal

and inefficient government, even in time of peace, is only a heavy load upon the people, without advantage or compensation. The women are like living puppets thrown into a bag of blue cotton, or party-coloured silk, from the top of which appears a bull-dog's head, plastered with rice-flour, and from the lower part legs thin as a peacock's. Their feet have been tied up until they ceased growing, with all the toes folded back excepting the great toe, which is allowed to reach its proper development, and thus their shoes can terminate in a point, and be of the size of a child's.

The journey did not become more prosperous; the country was wild and dreary; the livid inhabitants of a village were often found waiting like vultures round a dying horse, that they might secure its flesh. Indeed, cannibalism was said not to be unknown. The health of the party gave way, and, in pity for their way-worn condition, the chief man of Tay-phou, who could not understand how mandarins so learned as they were could be so poorly dressed, gave them a boat in which they could sail to the city Tong-chouan. The bridges were very numerous. Among the many public works with which the emperors have covered China, these are the most remarkable. The solid stone roads thrown over torrents are models of the perseverance of the Chinese in constructing them. Tablets of white marble near each give the history and difficulties of their erection. Some are very low, and the passengers are obliged to lie down in the boat, the captain repeating in Chinese: 'Here is a bridge. Oh, great men, lower your noble heads.' On arriving at the city, a mandarin led them to a pagoda, where a thousand fantastic details ornamented the gates, ceilings, and columns. Winged and climbing dragons and monsters of every kind were carved out of the wood, their golden heads and red tongues protruding amidst garlands of flowers and flights of birds. In preference to the large halls, they chose a granary for their abode, where they could paste paper over the windows, and use the dry, worn-out gods, placed there as lumber, for a fire, as the weather was extremely cold.

Not having succeeded in tracing the Mekong to its source, the party decided to try a detour into the province of Yun-nan, and its capital, Tali; in fact, into the very heart of the Mussulman rebels. If Europe has nothing now to fear from Islamism, it is not so with Africa and Asia, where it is making rapid strides, and has burst out on the frontiers of China; the sultan of Tali spreading his proclamations throughout the mountains, that the true God is about to triumph over the idols, and that the kingdom of the true believers will be established on the ruins of the empire of the infidels. It was about 1855 that the first disorders broke out, and it was in 1863 that the explorers started on an undertaking of no small peril, and warned by every one that they could never hope to return alive.

The journey was performed on a small kind of horse, common to the country, through a wilderness of gray, bare mountains, and by paths which scarcely offered foothold on the side of precipices. After a long and painful ascent between two deep mountains, they came in sight of the Blue River, and taking breath, they could admire the magnificent panorama of gold and purple hills, the calm river, and the gorgeous bushes of camellias and

rhododendrons which adorned the sheltered spots. In the plains, the poppy fields were in full bloom, impregnating the air with a perfume which affected the head. Animals themselves cannot resist the drowsiness it produces. The bees settle in crowds on these sirens of vegetation, and when the leaves have fallen, and men have gathered the poison, they refuse the honey of other plants, and die of inanition. Rats which have chosen for their abode a manufactory of opium, have been found dead after it was closed; they refused to live when this failed them. Horses and pigs act in the same manner. The salutary law which prohibited its cultivation was repealed after the ports were opened to European commerce; and the proprietors of land in Yun-nan and Setchuan refuse to grow anything else, so that the people die of famine beside the poppies, which have replaced the rice-fields.

Passing over long days of marching, they met with the Father Leguilcher, one of the Jesuits settled in various parts of the empire, and submitting to a voluntary banishment for their whole lives, none being permitted to return. He offered to be their interpreter and guide to the dangerous city of Tali; and leading them through zigzag paths down the mountains, they reached the high-road, commanded by a strong citadel. They solemnly announced themselves, giving the commander no time to refuse an entrance. He laid aside his opium-pipe, half inebriated, and gave orders to his people to blow a discordant blast on their clarionets. He had not embraced Islamism, but was tolerant and amiable, loading them with honours. Leaving their horses here, they walked to the entrance of a long valley, where opposite to them rose the magnificent mountains of Tali, their peaks covered with snow, and lost in the clouds; their feet bathed in a beautiful lake. Before the travellers stretched a carpet of verdure, in which were groups of red houses, the tiled roofs and gables white and glistening in the sun. Such colouring, light, and clearness made them forget the toils and difficulties of the way. A strong fort barred the narrow road, and here they were desired to wait for orders from the sultan. These arrived the next day, and a mandarin and some soldiers were appointed to lead them to him. The peril was great. Fourteen Europeans, as they said—but more probably Hindus—had lately been put to death; but they persevered. Entering the principal street, a mandarin, magnificently dressed and mounted, met them, and cast a disdainful eye at their miserable clothing. The crowd began to collect, excited, roaring, and trying to crush them; the soldiers even came from behind, and tore off their hats. This obliged them to use their bayonets, and a soldier fell down bleeding.

They afterwards discovered that this riot was caused by the curiosity of the sultan, who was watching them from the ramparts, and wished to examine their faces. The mandarin interfered, and led them to a house out of the city, where they were installed. The sultan sent other messengers to apologise and arrange an interview for the next day, putting them through a regular interrogatory as to their objects, which the travellers affirmed to be purely scientific. But when the hour fixed for the audience arrived, a mandarin came to inform them that the details were not fixed, and desired the priest to accompany him to

the sultan. He returned in an hour, having received the most violent anathemas for introducing 'people of this kind' into Tali, who only came to measure roads and distances. 'Go and tell these Europeans,' said the sultan, 'that they may have all the land watered by the Mekong as far as Yun-nan, but there they must stop. When they have conquered the whole of China, the impregnable kingdom of Tali will prove a boundary to their ambition which they cannot cross. I have already put to death a great number of strangers, and only spare these because they are recommended by a man who is venerated among Mussulmans. Let them return immediately to the place they came from, but misfortune will be upon their heads if they try to explore the Mekong.'<sup>\*</sup>

After this warning, nothing remained to them of the hope they had cherished; the soldiers invaded the whole house; and after a night of anxious watching, they started at dawn, without any opposition, until they gained the outer fortress. Here the mandarin ordered them to stop; but fearing imprisonment, they collected their horses and baggage, and started off at a gallop, notwithstanding the cries of the soldiers. No further interruption occurred, and they returned to Tong-tchouan, only to find, to their great grief, that the head of the expedition, M. de Lagrée, had died of exhaustion during their absence. Their strength and resources were alike exhausted; they had the satisfaction of feeling that they had explored three hundred miles beyond the point which Lieutenant-colonel Sarel and Dr Barton had reached in 1862, and had been the first to pass by this road into China, from Laos to Yun-nan. Now, all their aspirations turned to Shang-hai, to which place they had to cross nearly the whole of the empire, but that seemed easy when they could sail down the Yang-tse-kiang.

They engaged a Chinese to transport them as far as Souitchou-fou, taking with them the remains of their friend. This is a sacred duty in China; hence solemn funeral convoys are constantly met with, as a son would be dishonoured if he did not take his father's remains to the tomb of his ancestors. Souitchou must in the days of peace have had a real commercial importance, but the people were tumultuous, and set upon the strangers, calling aloud for their heads. The mandarins took no steps for their protection, and they were glad to hire another boat and leave the inhospitable shore. At every large town, however, the same thing occurred; no sooner did they land than a shower of stones greeted them, and they were obliged to take refuge in their junks. Glad were they when palaces on the shore and palaces on the water, the consulates and steamers of Hankao, greeted their eyes, wearied of savage life and Chinese barbarism. After being objects of curiosity to the simple Laotians, they were menaced with the same fate among Europeans. Their reception was most cordial, and on their part they were greedy of news, having been separated from all friends for two years. The steamer to Shang-hai was ready, and the pleasure of a separate cabin and a bed provided with sheets seemed almost overpowering. A fraternal banquet awaited them

\* The papers announce that the son of this emperor is on his way to England to open commercial relations with this country.

at the French consulate at Shang-hai; and again setting sail, China disappeared from their eyes, and the coasts of the An-namite peninsula rose above the horizon. They received the warmest welcome from the friends they had left behind them at Saigon; and the whole colony accompanied to the cemetery the body of M. de Lagr  e, where he rests amidst his companions in arms.

### HANDSOME.

#### IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER III.

Ne'er to brave the billows more,  
A lonely wreck on Fortune's shore;  
'Mid sullen calm and silent bay,  
Unseen to drop by dull decay.

A SEPTEMBER night, by turns stormy and fair; with, now, a heavy pall of indigo cloud stretched from horizon to horizon, blackening the world; now, the cloud broken, and rolling to and fro in fleecy masses, pierced with keen points of stars; now, earth and sea bathed in floods of moonlight, till every tall church tower, gray crag, and crested wave shone, transfigured to silver in the dim glory, and pointed to heaven like spirit-arms. The light-house tower, fifteen miles out at sea—damp with the spray that played always round its rocky base, and licked with foamy tongues its solid sides, as a wild beast licks its prey before sinews lacerate and bones crack under its cruel teeth—was silvered from its height to its foundations by the radiant stream, and stood like a temple, forlorn, pure, severe, unshaken by storm and sunshine, change of seasons and tides—cut off, like a human life, from tender daily troubles and joys, to be by its own suffering the salvation of others.

Often, in stormy weather, an awful white wind-sheer would curl to its topmost pinnacle, wring and shake it, and try to drag it down, till a shudder ran through all the stout masonry, and the light of the lamps, crimson and white by turns, quivered like bubbling blood on the churned billows: often the watery artillery would rush, wave after wave, upon it, draw back again, to gather up its strength, and make fresh assaults, with the crash of cannon: often strange sea-fowl, driven by stress of weather, would alight on its summit, and vex the night with dismal unknown cries, and uncouth forms flitting round the great eyes of the lamp. To-night was, after all, only like most other nights in that dreary scene; the ordinary thunder of wind and rain, the ordinary desolation. In the 'light-room,' at the summit of the building, with a watchful yet abstracted eye on his charge, stood the one of the three keepers whose turn it was to be on guard. He had left the watch-room beneath, to correct some defect in the light, and now gazed upon it, wrapped in thought. The rule 'that no bed, sofa, or other article for the purpose of reclining should be permitted in the watch-room,' was no hardship to this man; and the weariest hour of his vigil was that when it ceased, when he threw himself on his bed, dreading already the heavy and melancholy waking sure to follow his melancholy dreams.

This day, two years ago, he came here first; since then, though in a measure forced by the rules of the service to take his turn of leave, he had spent those enforced periods in a fisherman's hut only less desolate than his present abode, almost within sight of it; and had come back, not so

much sickened at its familiar, monotonous loneliness, as glad of its shelter from the eye of his kind.

His companions thought 'Mr George,' as they called him with involuntary respect, 'queer;' for when, as sometimes happened in the winter, all communication with the mainland was cut off for weeks, and their own resources of amusement were exhausted, he would appear proportionately more tranquil in mind; would permit their society, instead of keeping apart; sleep, instead of walking up and down his room like a wild beast in a cage; and even talk to them, and tell them stories out of the books he had read, and about the 'foreign parts' he had visited. They liked him, after a fashion, for he was always willing to keep double watch, or do double work of any kind, whether it were rubbing 'reflectors,' or pumping up oil from the works, or trimming wicks; and, silent as he was, he never sulked or quarrelled, as men shut up together without much occupation are apt to do. Only when Jim Saunders, the younger keeper, who was a bad marksman, shooting gulls from the gallery, wounded more than he killed, and the poor things lay about gasping, bleeding, and broken-winged, on the rocks, Mr George flew into a terrible passion; and having fetched his gun, and put them one and all out of their pain, unreasonably swore that if he, Jim, amused himself in that manner again, he would write to the authorities, and by mentioning sundry peccadillos—of Jim's neglect of duty, &c.—get him removed. Jim's pastime was cut short accordingly, for both the men were aware that Mr George (though he had of course passed the usual examination and probation) had got his appointment through some great man at the Trinity House, which is the supreme fetic of light-house keepers.

Yet, one day, when the elder keeper, Adam Lynn, remarked wistfully that 'there was a strange kind of a bird, dragging its wing as if it was hurt, and he had a brother as was main fond of curiosities,' Mr George with his own hand shot the creature dead, sent his dog *Jack* to fetch it, and politely presented it to Adam.

'Gentlefolks has queer ways, and I'll lay *he's* a gentleman,' remarked Adam philosophically.

Mr George's dog *Jack* was a character, and a much better companion than either Jim or Adam. A brown retriever, with a tightly curled coat, rendered tighter by daily sea-baths, golden-hazel, plaintive, loving eyes, and a hoarse pathetic voice which was almost human. *Jack* was a sensitive and affectionate, but sullen and reserved personage. He had few friends—though, if let alone, he was civil to all; his love for the few he had was testified by a mesmerised, constant, mournful stare, as if he were trying to speak, accompanied by an occasional strangled whine, the gentlest hold (which could not crack an egg-shell) of his big white teeth on the favoured person's hand or garment, and the continual blunt pater of his padded feet in their wake. Up-stairs or down, on the crags, in the water, *Jack* was at Mr George's heels, and woe to the individual who should try to hold him back from his master! He had jumped from the gallery round the light-house a dozen times, on seeing Mr George on the granite ridges beneath. He had knocked Jim Saunders down, and hung to his nose, when the latter, in play, stood between him and the former; he flew barking and growling, open-mouthed, at the very waves, when they



audaciously rose against Mr George as he took his daily swim. In short, there was nothing he would not do for that adored being; and for once, happy among dogs, I think his adoration was worthily requited. Jack was absurdly beloved by his lonely master; jealously, absurdly watched, to see if he shewed preference for anybody else, and nursed through the diseases and accidents of his foolish puppyhood—'As if he were a Christian,' said the others, scandalised.

However, they had grown accustomed to Mr George's peculiarities by this time, even to his hatred of leave, and his extraordinary habit of shutting himself up when visitors came to lionise the light-house, thus losing his share of probable gratuities; and they liked and respected him all the better for the mystery that hung about him; which was perhaps human nature.

The bright glow of the sleepless lamp and the faint light of sunrise were struggling together in the light-house tower, as Mr George stood looking out, remembering what day it was, and thinking, with a heavy sigh, how slowly the two years of his residence here had passed, what an enormously long vista of life, to all appearance, spread before him. Standing with his hand—a delicate, shapely hand, though deeply scarred—on Jack's rough head, Jack at his knee, still as a statue, he looked to right and left at the faint crimson flush deepening in the heavens, on the waves; the paling stars, the drifting clouds of lilac and gold, at the sea forgetting its wrath below, and the faint purple line of shore just visible in the extreme clearness of the early dawn. Fair things all; but oh! how weary to him!

'And I am only twenty-nine,' said he despairingly. 'O the years to come!' Jack uttered a sympathetic howl, and planting his paws on his master's leg, looked up adoringly.

'Yes, old fellow, I've got you,' answered Mr George fondly. 'But you'll die before I shall, most likely, and I shall be worse off than I am now. Ah, Jack, I wish you and I could change the span of our days.'

Jack continued whining, staring, adoring: poor fellow, he had no other arts of comfort.

'What is it? You don't know what an idiot anybody would think you, to stare so at such an object as I am: though, perhaps in your eyes, you fond, stupid fool, I look different—because you love me. But you are only a dog, Jack, that's it, a brute, without a soul. Go away, sir; go down, and don't make a fool of me too.'

Jack feigned departure; but secretly crept into a corner behind his master, and lay there like a stuffed dog.

Mr George had not spoken untruly in calling himself an object; but there was something to stare at in him, though certainly not beauty. He was rather tall, and well proportioned, but disfigured by a slight stiffness and pain of gait and gesture, which extended to all his limbs; and while it did not affect their strength, and scarcely their rapidity of movement, was entirely fatal to grace. He had, however, fair, wavy curls, blue eyes, and a white skin; but across the right eyelid, to the roots of his hair, breaking the outline of the eyebrow, and making a purple line and a succession of deep dents on his forehead, ran a great scored scar; and beneath the left eye, and on the upper part of his nose, others began;

though they, and whatever disfigurements existed elsewhere, were hidden by a large black handkerchief wrapped round and round, entirely concealing even the outline of the lower part of his face, and so firmly fastened inside his coat that no exertion or accident could disarrange it. As a consequence, there is little more to describe in the light-house keeper, except the profound, half-humiliated sadness of his eyes, and the hoarse, muffled, unnatural sound of his voice emerging from under the close wrapper.

He stood long motionless, but at last roused himself with a start, extinguished the lamp, and having trimmed and burnished it in readiness for next evening, and seen that all was in order—no very brief task—he descended the ladder, and with Jack slinking close at his heels, sought his own apartment. It was very small, with a certain likeness to a ship's cabin; but without any of the clever contrivances or odd ornaments often seen in such places. It was as bare as the hole of a hybernating animal, as a cell in a prison, as the torpid, ugly, loveless life of its owner. Mr George did not go to bed, but sat down on his one chair, and leaning back, looked deep into vacancy; whereat Jack crept up, and sitting on his haunches before his master, threw back his head, and opened his mouth with a half-inaudible whine of sympathy.

'Jack!' said Mr George suddenly, struck with a bitter thought. (He was a morbid person, and, for want of anything more satisfactory to hug, hugged his woes.)

'Wow!' replied Jack with sharp emphasis, beating his tail on the floor, and quivering all over with repressed anxiety to go actively about his master's will.

'You shall see such a thing as you never saw in your life before; and if it makes any difference to you—as the chances are it will—I swear I'll send you ashore by the next boat that comes. Look here, then, sir!'

Jack's comprehension was happily not quite full enough for the latter part of this speech to distress his canine mind. He only understood that something was to be explained to him, perhaps—blissful idea!—to be followed by something which he was to do. So he kept his eye on his master, as was his custom when a new trick was taught him, and waited patient and trustful while Mr George slowly loosened the folds of the black handkerchief he wore, let it drop, and stooping his face down, close to his dumb friend, said, in a sharp, strained voice: 'Now, sir! Do you know me? Jack!'—in a voice of sarcasm—'do you love me now?'

Jack rose up on his hind-legs, put his paws on his master's shoulders in an almost human caress, and with a great whine of love, pity, and anguish, licked his face. Then a shower of hot tears fell on his shaggy coat, and a broken voice said humbly: 'Poor, dear fool! God made this dog; perhaps there's hope yet.'

Bright weather had set in that September day; but one morning, a little later, to experienced eyes it shewed signs of change. The gay green sea still broke in harmless crystals against the light-house rocks; the sky was clear blue overhead; brown-sailed fishing-smacks, tiny boats, and a few white-winged yachts, still glided fearlessly over the

bright ripples; but the coast-line looked ominously near and clear, and a few threads of long purple cloud lay straight, as if ruled there, across the pale horizon.

'Bad weather comin' up: we'll light early to-night,' said Adam Lynn.

Mr George acquiesced with languid indifference, and continued to pace monotonously up and down a path he had worn for himself on the narrow domain, with Jack behind him as usual.

'Don't care for nothing under the sun, it's my belief,' muttered Adam, looking after him as he walked away; and he was not far from the truth.

That afternoon, as Mr George sat reading in his room with Jack, that animal was seized with violent and unaccountable excitement. He ran and smelled at the door, growling wickedly in an undertone; returned, and looked up at his master expressively, as much as to say: 'An enemy of ours;' repeated the process, and finally lay down between him and danger, with open eyes, and his head between his fore-paws. Mr George was depressingly indifferent, and took no heed. Presently, Jim Saunders entered agitated, and announced that 'a gentleman as had been out a-fishin' from one of them yachts in the offing had been took ill, and put in at the light-house, to get brandy and such-like.'

'Says he can't bear the motion o' the boat,' said Jim, grinning unsympathetically. 'Wants to lie down and have a doctor. A bad-plucked one, for all he's so big and black. I told him as he'd best go back to her [the yacht] or to shore; but he says no; and when he hears old Adam was a bit of a doctor, nothing would keep him out of here. So the boat's gone to bring her as near as may be, that he may get aboard; and there he lies groanin', a rare un, in Adam's berth. Can hear him from here, Mr George, you can.'

'The dog does,' said Mr George shortly and carelessly; and Jim went away.

Late that afternoon, as Mr George was going up to take his watch, with his hand on Jack's neck, to prevent the dog's racing up joyfully before him, he passed the open door of Adam's room, and glancing absently in, stood fixed to the spot, grasping Jack till he was nearly asphyxiated. The sick man lay on the narrow bed, a fever-flush on his cheek, the rest of his face of a yellowish pallor; his black hair lay damply on his forehead, and his dark eyes were open, and rolling restlessly. He did not see who looked at him—he was too much occupied with his own fears and sufferings—and only started and muttered fretfully as Jack gave a low snarl of strange intuitive aversion, and struggled a little under his master's gripe.

The sound broke the spell that paralysed Mr George, and recalled him to the gentler feelings poor Jack's blind love had awakened. He said in a hoarse whisper: 'Brydone, Brydone!' and rushed headlong up the steep stair, away from the sight which maddened him.

He kept his watch, went down afterwards, averting his head resolutely from 'that door,' paced his room, and at last slept from pure exhaustion.

The old weary routine went on next day, with double duty; for the weather was so stormy, no boat dared approach the rocks found the light-house, and the 'strange gentleman' was worse, and occupied much of Adam's time, without any happy

results, however, attending the latter's confused attempts at treatment.

So passed another day. On the third, while Jim was up-stairs cleaning, Adam came with a grave face to his third companion.

'The gentleman—Brydone, he says, his name is—is uncommon bad,' said he.

Mr George sat immovable and gloomy.

'I think he'll get over it,' continued the other, sinking his voice. 'But he's sure he's dying. And there's a something on his mind tries him so awful; it may kill him if he don't get rid of it, no doubt. I told him what I thought, and asked, would he tell me. But he said, wasn't there any one above me, a superintendent, like, to hear it. I says no; but there was Mr George, as had been a gentleman, and never a better hand at holding his tongue—which is true, sir.'

'Well?'

'Well; and you'll come to him?'

'No,' said Mr George hastily; 'I can't: it's impossible. Let him tell you.'

'He won't. I've been persuading him all day to; but he's got a sick fancy about it. You wouldn't refuse a dying man, Mr George? You'll die yourself some day. And if you don't like him to see you,' added Adam deprecatingly, mindful of his hearer's peculiarities, 'I'll take the candle away; the light does hurt his eyes. Just satisfy him, sir, and I believe you may save his life.'

What was Mr George muttering under his breath? 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.' What, next moment, came into his mind? following the other mechanically, indeed, learned long ago in childish tasks, but vivid with the strength of the Truth: 'But I say unto you, love your enemies.' He rose from his chair, pulled the handkerchief higher over his face, and made Jack lie down in his corner.

'Yes, take away the candle,' said he faintly. 'I'll come.'

And I think there was something in this, quietly as it was done, of that 'victory which overcometh the world.'

He went in softly to the darkened room, and felt his way to a chair by the bedside. A hot bony hand felt for his, and clutched it fast.

'You have come,' said a harsh voice that made him shudder, in spite of his self-command, and draw his breath hard. 'Thank you—God reward you. You are a gentleman, these fellows say!'

'Yes,' said Mr George in a whisper.

'You'll keep my secret, then. But it's a horror—a horror, I tell you,' he continued, without waiting for a reply. 'I could not die with it on my soul.' Then, with frequent pauses, despairing blasphemies alternated with wild inquiries: 'Can God forgive me? Dare I have hope?' Brydone told the story of his crime, to an auditor who sat breathless as himself, with heart throbbing like thunder in his ears, with the sweat standing on his forehead, and the hand the sick man would not let go, icy cold.

'After I left Penorna,' said Brydone presently, 'I travelled from place to place, without resting. How could I rest, with that behind me? But there was never a precipice but I seemed to see him fall down it, nor a sea in which he was not struggling, nor a cry anywhere that did not say those same words he said as he died.—And yet, I loved her so; I did, did love her—I could

not give her up. Nobody else had such a right to her as I; nobody else had done murder for her sake. I went back, found her out, and was with her. I let her talk to me about *him*, and cry over his picture, though her tears burned me like hell-fire. And by degrees she got to trust me, and lean on me, and like me. Now, at last, she loves me, and in a month we were to have been married—she, whom I sinned for, whom I've borne this torture for. O Netta!—with a terrible cry—'I can't die now, and go to my punishment; I must have you, just a little, first. Am I to gain nothing, and be lost for ever? O God! I will not die!' His voice failed, and there was a long pause.

Then Mr George said very softly, and with a strange sad tenderness in his voice: 'Does she love you now?'

'She does—she vowed it. And in a month'—

'Hush!' said the other with sudden authority, yet in a bitter tone. 'You will not die; your pulse is stronger—I've been feeling it—and your voice—and—No, Mr Brydone, you'll live, and go back to her, and be happy. And perhaps'—with tremulous passion that would force its way—'perhaps that heaven of happiness may make you repent what hell couldn't! I trust it may.' Then he rose, went abruptly away, and locked himself into his room. He staid there so long, and was so silent, and *Jack* whined so pitifully, that the others were alarmed; but his voice reassured them, saying impatiently: 'Nothing, nothing. I am ill; let me alone.'

Within, he was kneeling down, with a white, convulsed face, in the middle of the room, pressing the dog to his side with one arm, with the other raised to heaven, fighting a harder battle, doing a nobler deed, according to his light, than half the actions which stars and medals, rank and wealth, reward.

He had won the victory: crouching on the floor, with his arm round his dog's neck, with his whole frame released from its tension of agony, relaxed and helpless, with the flickering, failing candle-light full on that pale disfigured mask which had once been a face smiling on Life, as Life seemed to smile on it—he knew it himself. So look heaven's victors often, on this side their reward.

Brydone recovered, and with his recovery came unspeakable alarm at his own madness in confessing his crime to a complete stranger. He felt an instinct that it would be vain to attempt to bribe his silent hearer—that to throw himself on the latter's honour was his only chance. So, with a sinking soul, before he departed in the yacht's boat, which had come to fetch him, he requested Adam to send 'the gentleman' to him.

Mr George came, and stood with downcast head and muffled face till Adam was out of hearing; then he shut the door, returned, and said with quiet and sad bitterness, and his eyes fixed full on the other's: 'Don't you know me, Brydone?'

Brydone staggered back against the wall with uplifted hands, and eyes so widely opened that the white shewed all round the dark irides; his yellow cheek grew fearfully pale, and his clammy lips could scarcely mutter: 'You—you!'

'I, Tempest!' said the other calmly. 'Not dead, indeed; but worse than dead. I have my story to tell, now. You had better sit down, while you hear it.'

Brydone obeyed, mechanically, muttering to

himself with dry lips. Then he suddenly started up, caught Tempest by the arm, and, dragging him to the light, stared intently in his face. Tempest's eyelids quivered, and his eyes dilated painfully at the scrutiny, and a flush, long a stranger there, crept over his forehead; but he endured it calmly, and when Brydone fell back on his seat, began gravely, but in a matter-of-fact tone, rather as if he were telling another man's story than his own, the sad relation.

'I did not see who pushed me over the cliff—I felt it done. I knew I did not fall of myself; but I could not see the person. I just thought of calling to her that I had found her locket, and that was all. When I came to myself, I was lying on the rocks below, writhing in agony, blind with the blood that ran in hot streams over my face every moment, and without power to move a finger, or cry out for help. I believed I was dying, and I tried to pray; but somehow I could only think of her little locket, and of the bright morning beside the sea at Penorna. I lay there, feeling wave after wave come coldly up, each a little farther than the last. I got numbed, body and mind, at length, so that I suffered little, and didn't care what happened; till something moved near, and somebody touched me, and cried out: "Oh, poor, poor creature; the Lord have mercy on him! His face is all crushed to pieces." That woke my mind at least, and I managed to put up this right hand, which was the only part of me not injured, and feel my face. Brydone, I couldn't feel *anything*, for I had dragged it against the sharp rocks all the way down, in trying to save myself. My nose was broken, and my cheek cut almost in half, and this eye'—

'Hush, for God's sake!—hush, I say!' cried Brydone fiercely: 'you don't know what you're saying.'

'Well, I certainly need not tell you that—you can imagine it,' said Tempest, still quietly: 'at anyrate, when I saw how I was disfigured, and yet felt I might live a day or two, I made the people who had found me (a fisherman's widow and her two boys, who lived in a hut built under the cliff, close by) promise to say nothing of my existence. I suppose it was my vanity,' said he, laughing bitterly: 'I couldn't bear that *she* should see me so; I thought if she knew I were so hurt, perhaps dying, she would want to come to me—and from the very first moment till now, I have had her face always before me as it might—*must* have looked, if she had seen—this; and he laid his hand on the black handkerchief.

Brydone shuddered, and hastily and guiltily averted his gaze.

'I shall not shew it you,' said Tempest coldly; 'don't fear. Well, these people promised. They dragged me to their hut, and there I lay, between life and death, for weeks; never without pain—never, never without the consciousness of what had happened to me—of how my life, and my love, and my hopes were all blighted. They were kind to me in their rough way—did their best—and kept my secret faithfully. There was no other cottage for miles round, and nobody knew of my existence even. By the time I was enough myself to think matters over, six weeks had passed. I knew my death would by that time be imagined and announced; that, therefore, the shock to Netta would be over. I thought she was so young—had known

me such a little while—she would soon forget me. Whereas, if I went to her, and said: "This hideous, disfigured, maimed wretch is Dolly Tempest, who was to have been your husband"—she would either keep her vows to me from honour and pity only, and be miserable, or give me up in horror, with that look with the fear of which I had always been haunted. Both ways, for us both, concealment seemed best. Then I had been so proud of my good looks—do you remember, Brydone, what an ass you thought me!—perhaps I was one, and his voice trembled a little; 'I was very happy. I couldn't endure the idea of meeting my friends and all the people I had known; so changed—such a miserable spectacle; of being noticed from pity, and all that. So, while I was getting up my strength, I thought matters over, and I determined.'—

'But,' began Brydone huskily, 'did you never wonder who'— His voice failed.

'Yes, I did,' answered Tempest; 'but I had not the faintest suspicion of—you. At first, I thought it might have been some tramp, who saw the locket in my hand, and wanted to rob me; afterwards— However, as I said, when I thought things over, I resolved to change my name, and get this sort of post. A light-house I had seen, as I stood by the shore that happy morning with her, made me think of it; and I got morbidly fond of the idea, and cared as much for it as I have ever cared for anything since—I fell.'

I don't know why Brydone's eyes, which had been dry enough during all this sad narrative, should fill with sudden tears at that little pause; the simple words that followed, the half-sad, half-smiling gleam in the speaker's blue eyes. It was only Tempest's way of putting things, to spare his enemy pain; but it went to that enemy's hard heart.

'I had a friend high up at Trinity House,' continued he, 'and he promised to get me what I wanted; told me the little information I had to get up to pass the examination, gave me credentials, and all that. While I was still hiding in the hut, not caring what I did, so I *was* hidden, I used to creep out, late at night and early in the morning, under the cliffs, and throw stones into the sea, and think of Dolly Tempest, who was dead, and wish Mr George, who came to life, might not have a long one. In one of these walks, just at the spot where I had fallen, where there were still bits of my clothes among the stones, I saw, wedged into a crevice, a stick with a silver head. I pulled it out, and read what was engraved upon it—you know. And then, Brydone, it flashed upon me who had made me what I was. For the first instant, I felt a devil in me.'

Brydone started, with a stinging recollection of his own temptation, and how it had been met.

'But I prayed where I stood; and instead of taking it back, where my hosts might have found it, I hid it safe under the stones. I often came back, and looked at the place, and had black thoughts of revenge; but sometimes the moon shone, or the sun rose, or a bird sang in a bush at the top of the cliff, and stopped me. Well, I went up to London, taking only the fellow who got me appointed into my confidence, passed the examination and probation, and came here. Before I left the hut, I gave the people money enough to go back to Ireland, whence they had originally come'—

'And my stick?' interrupted Brydone breathlessly.

'I have it here.'

'But—but I could not be—be— It would not be death,' cried the unhappy man convulsively. 'You are alive and well—the same as ever—Tempest; it could only be'—

'The same!' cried Tempest, starting passionately to his feet. 'Do I look as I used to look, move as I moved, speak as I spoke? Could I go back to my old world, and ask a woman to marry such a thing as I? Are you a devil, that you can look at your work, and say that!'

'No, no,' muttered Brydone, dropping his tone of wild defiance. 'I didn't mean it—I did not know what I said.' Then, in a hoarse whisper, and with heavy, horror-stricken eyes fixed on the other's face, he asked: 'Then you mean to betray me, and get me punished, and go back and marry her after all?'

'No; I shall not marry her.'

'And yet revenge yourself all the same on me? Have you no pity, Tempest? And yet,' he groaned, covering his face with his hands, 'I deserve it!'

There was silence for a moment, then a hand was laid gently on his shoulder. He looked up, and saw Tempest standing beside him, holding the silver-headed stick, that fatal piece of evidence.

'Brydone,' said he, in a voice that faltered a very little; 'God has mercy; shall I have none? See here!' He broke the stick in half, and flung the pieces across the room, out of the open window. 'There goes the only proof. Upon my honour, I swear not to betray you. You must never let her know what you did, nor that I am living. Now go—be good to her—make her happy—good-bye.'

He turned away, went to the window, and stood with his back to Brydone, looking out. He heard, dreamily, a heavy sob of deep relief, broken thanks, an unsteady tread receding, a door closed; a little later, the keel of the yacht's boat grated, parting, against the rock, and Brydone was gone. Tempest watched the skiff go dancing and courtesying over the sparkling billows, into a broad track of sunshine, grow smaller and smaller, and then reach the yacht. Soon after, she, too, sailed away landwards, and was lost to sight. Then he returned to his own room, and looked vacantly round, with a furrowed brow, a hard eye, a hard heart too, for an instant. But Jack rushed out of a corner, sprang upon him and licked his face, his hands, his clothes, in an agony of love. Then Tempest's frozen heart melted, and crying out: 'O Jack, I've got nothing but you!' he sat down on his bed, and wept like a child.

Henceforth, nothing but monotony was before him, with a lonely death at the end. He resumed his dreary round of life. He lit and cleaned the lamps, took his watch, caressed Jack, and listened patiently to old Adam's yarns, and Jim Saunders' long-winded narratives of the incidents of his leave. He made calm and mournful calculation that if he attained the ordinary age of mankind, as the Bible gave it, he must still have thirty years to live; and (though he shrank somewhat from the prospect) endeavoured to accustom himself to life as other men do to death; for he knew that his general health was improving, the weakness and stiffness consequent on his terrible fall leaving his limbs gradually, and everything seemed against a speedy end to his troubles.



In a newspaper brought to the light-house a month after Brydone had left it, he read the announcement of the latter's marriage with Netta. Jack little knew what made his desolate master hold the great paw laid on his knee so fast, and caress it so fondly, that night. That was at the end of November. Before another November had come round, Brydone had gone to his account, and Netta was a widow.

'But it makes no difference to me,' said Mr George bitterly.

Then his life settled down again, and two more years passed over his head.

### THE LAST OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS.

It is a pity that our Laureate has been witched by Merlin, and pours his genius out so lavishly on such a worn-out theme as Arthur and his knights. Well as he has treated it, we own ourselves fairly tired of the 'table round;' he has never beaten that magnificent epic fragment, his *Morte d'Arthur*; and all that he has told us subsequently about the blameless king wears of necessity an air of bathos. It is hard upon the age that its two greatest poets should studiously select as subjects for their muse, periods, places, things, so foreign to modern taste, and out of the reach of modern sympathy. It was not so even with Scott, who, with all his love for old romance, gave us many a tender ballad, that touches the heart of nowadays; nor with Byron, who could sometimes strike the harp without invoking his melodramatic self with scowl and curse; in Wordsworth, in Keats, in Shelley, there is plenty of human feeling, and many a pleasant poem that sows joy and peace in those who read it. And none of these so flouted their admirers as to apply themselves for years to wearisome Italian tales, like Browning, or prehistoric romances, like Tennyson. In the latter case, it is the more to be regretted, because the Laureate can be 'very human' if he will, and makes no pretence of despising his readers. It is sad to think that the man who has lightened so many a woeful heart, and set so many a young head a-thinking rightly, should waste his melodious verse on Gareths and Gawains. That even in this, his latest poem (and which, Apollo be praised! he promises shall be his last upon the subject), there are exquisite 'bits,' and graceful turns and flights, must be owned by all who can appreciate poetry at all; it is still Tennyson who is writing: but it is a dreary, weary performance, nevertheless; and, but for the great name appended to it, would excite little comment.

*Gareth and Lynette*,\* then, is another Arthurian idyll, which an advertisement slip in the preface, reminding us of an *erratum* in Bradshaw, and almost as puzzling, informs us is to be read after *The Coming of Arthur*; while *The Last Tournament*, which makes up the volume, is to be taken immediately preceding *Guinevere*—like a dinner-pill before meals. In fiction, a gentleman who gave us his third volume at starting, his first next, and his second by way of conclusion, would not be thought much of at the libraries; but to poets, it seems, this license is granted.

\* *Gareth and Lynette*. By Alfred Tennyson. Strahan & Co.

Gareth,

The last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,

is desirous, as only young men of Arthur's time were ever known to be, to leave home and comfort, not for pleasure, nor even excitement, but in order to redress the wrongs of humanity, providing always that the wrongs were endured by ladies of gentle birth, such as were worth fighting for. He wishes to be a knight of the blameless king, and in his service to cleanse the world of offenders. In vain his mother pleads with him that she shall be left lonely, for his

Father Lot beside the hearth  
Lies like a log, and all but smouldered out!

A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,  
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.

The boy says he must go; let her put his earnestness of purpose to what proof she will. Then, says she, he shall go disguised to Arthur's hall, and hire himself to serve among the scullions for a twelvemonth and a day, nor tell his name to any—'no, not the king.'

This was rather what sporting persons term a 'bullfinch' for the princely Gareth, and he shies and swerves at it a little; but in the end he accepts these hard conditions. Accompanied by two of his hinds—a class of whom King Arthur's knights take very little account indeed, by-the-by, though we suppose they composed about nine-tenths of the then human race, and had doubtless 'wrongs' enough—Gareth comes to Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces, and whose gate (we most thoroughly believe the Laureate's word for it)—

There was no gate like it under heaven.  
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined  
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,  
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress  
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;  
But like the cross her great and goodly arms  
Stretched under all the cornice and upheld:  
And drops of water fell from either hand;  
And down from one a sword was hung, from one  
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;  
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish.

Whether this fish was a sturgeon or not, it is most certain it will be 'caviare to the multitude,' and very much astonished were the hinds to see it, especially in the position indicated in the text.

'Lord,' cried they, 'the gateway is alive; and very naturally wanted to go home again, where fish kept their proper places. However, an aged seer starts out, while they are in doubt about it, to whom they apply for information, and this old gentleman tells them what school-boys call a 'tremendous corker,' in fact 'makes hay of them,' which Gareth resents as a liberty, and a discourtesy to strangers.

'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?'

returns the ancient—

"Confusion, and illusion, and relation,  
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?"

I humbugged you, it is true, but it was because you tried to humbug me, by pretending to be nobody, when you are a young nobleman in disguise—

And now thou goest up to mock the King,  
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie.

And here again is a proof of the shallow, fanciful stuff of which Arthurian ethics are composed. There was much talk of virtue and humility at the Round Table; but unless a man's father chanced to be noble, no merit was allowed to him whatever. Gareth's high birth, therefore, has to be detected not only by the seer, but by Lancelot, in order to awaken the necessary interest in his future career. When Gareth asks to serve in the king's kitchen, and it is granted to him, the Seneschal, Sir Kay, suggests that he has

Broken from some Abbey, where,  
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow;  
whereupon Lancelot remarks:

Sir Seneschal,  
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray,\* and all the hounds;  
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:  
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,  
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands  
Large, fair and fine!—Some young lad's mystery.

This is the reverse of Bottom's explanation in the *Midsommer Night's Dream*; all are forewarned it is a Lion, though it pretends to be so mild an animal: no scullion is he, but a nobleman. Moreover, to make all sure with respect to this princely youth, his mother, as we afterwards learn, has written a private note to the king, informing him of the whole matter. It was very early in history, but Gas (of a certain sort) seems not to have been in its infancy, while Snobbism was very full-grown indeed.

The scene in Arthur's Hall, where the shields hang of all his knights, carved, or blazoned, or blank, according to the deeds of each, is well described; and how to the king sitting in judgment come the suppliants crying, 'A boon! a boon!' which seems to have been the ancient substitute for application to the Court of Chancery through one's legal adviser.

So Gareth all for glory underwent  
The sooty yoke of kitchen vassalage;  
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,  
And couched at night with grimy kitchen-knives.  
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,  
But Kay the seneschal who loved him not  
Would hustle and harry him, and labour him  
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set  
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,  
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bowed himself  
With all obedience to the King, and wrought  
All kind of service with a noble ease  
That graced the lowliest act in doing it—

Until a month had passed, when his mother, repentant of the oath she had made him swear, sent

Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.  
He goes to the king, therefore, at once, and tells him all (which he knew perfectly well before), and prays to be enrolled among his knights.

'I have staggered thy strong Gawain in a tilt  
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.  
Make me thy knight—in secret! let my name  
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring  
Like flame from ashes.'

\* Surely this 'gray' for grayhound is curious: suppose the line had run:

'Christian, thou knowest, and Sun, and all the names!'

So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm  
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly  
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.  
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,  
'I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.  
Look therefore when he calls for this in hall,  
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.  
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see  
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.'

The desired opportunity soon occurs, for that same day there comes a suppliant damsel of high lineage (that, of course),

With a brow  
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,  
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose  
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.

A pretty girl, in fact, with a *nez retroussé*, her name Lynette, whose sister, Lyonors, is held a prisoner in Castle Perilous, by one called Night or Death, whose three fierce brothers hold all the passes of the fords, so that none can rescue her from him. Their names are Sir Morning-star, Sir Noon-sun, and Sir Evening-star; so that, in addition to the misty Arthurian atmosphere, it will be seen that we have in this poem to contend with allegory,

Baleful knight, whose Squire is Headache.

Lynette, after describing the especial difficulties of her sister's position, demands that no less than Lancelot himself shall be sent to succour her,

Hereat Sir Gareth called from where he rose,  
A head with kindling eyes above the throne,  
'A boon, Sir King—this quest!' . . . .

'Thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,  
And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I,  
And I can topple over a hundred such.'

Imagine the sensation in the court, and the indignation of Lynette herself (devoted, of course, as her sex is to this day, to 'the gentlemanly interest'), when the king grants Gareth's prayer.

'Fie on thee, King! I asked for thy chief knight,  
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave;'

and, like the young lady who volunteered to accompany Miss Nightingale to the Crimea, but threw up her post so soon as she understood that she would be required to tend the common soldiers, she flies the royal presence in high dudgeon, and takes horse for home, still murmuring 'kitchen-knave.'

Sir Gareth, mounted on a noble steed, and armed from head to heel, spurs after her; but she will not deign to hear him, and is presently delighted to see Sir Kay—

The most ungente knight in Arthur's hall—

in pursuit of them, himself outraged at Gareth's insolence, and resolved to punish him.

'Have at thee then,' said Kay: they shocked, and  
Kay  
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again:  
'Lead, and I follow,' and fast away she fled.

She will not have even his help, at any price; but

As one  
That smells a foul-fleshed agaric in the holt,  
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,  
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose  
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, 'Hence!  
Avoid, thou smelllest all of kitchen-grease.'

But Sir Gareth, who is really the quintessence of good temper, merely answers :

‘ Say  
Whate’er ye will, but whatsoe’er ye say,  
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,  
Or die therefore.’

They miss their way, and presently in a gloomy-gladed hollow,

In the deeps whereof a mere,  
Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl,  
Under the half-dead sunset glared,

they come upon six villains, about to drown a baron. He had been wont, it seems, to tie large stones about such caitiffs’ necks, and drown *them* there :

And under this wan water many of them  
Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,  
And rise, and flickering in a grimly light,  
Dance on the mere.

So that these six were but making reprisals, after all. But Sir Gareth strikes in, and frees the baron, and is asked for that good service to his castle. Lynette accompanies him thither, but positively declines to sit at the same table with him.

‘ Deem not that I accept thee aught the more,  
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit  
Down on a rout of craven foresters.’

Yet, the next day, when on the quest once more, she shews a slight sign of melting ; in answer to Sir Gareth’s usual ‘Lead, and I follow,’ she answers :

‘ I fly no more : I allow thee for an hour.  
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,  
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks  
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool ?  
For hard by here is one will overthrow  
And slay thee : then will I to court again,  
And shame the King for only yielding me  
My champion from the ashes of his hearth.’

The gradual reconciliation of the damsel to her knight, by reason of his various deeds of prowess, is very gracefully wrought out, while the whole poem sparkles with gems of poetic fancy—the splendid setting of a picture that is not worthy of its frame.

Here is the arming of Sir Day-star :

Then at his call : ‘ O daughters of the Dawn,  
And servants of the Morning-star, approach,  
Arm me,’ from out the silken curtain-folds  
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls  
In gilt and rosy raiment came : their feet  
In dewy grasses glistened ; and the hair  
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem  
Like sparkles in the stone Avantine.  
These armed him in blue arms, and gave a shield  
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.  
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,  
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,  
Glorious ; and in the stream beneath him, shone,  
Immingled with Heaven’s azure waveringly,  
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,  
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Sir Gareth conquers him, but cannot conquer yet Lynette’s aversion to him.

‘ Methought,  
Knave, when I watched thee striking on the bridge,  
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me  
A little faintlier : but the wind hath changed :  
I scent it twenty-fold.’

Then Gareth overcomes Sir Noonday Sun—the whole poem is a glorified sort of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which we should not have been the least astonished to meet Sir Facing-both-ways armed from head to heel—and still more melts the damsel : then he quenches Sir Evening-star by the summary process of throwing him into the river ; and eventually slays Death or Night, out of whose cleft skull issues the bright face of a blooming boy—whereby, we suppose, is imaged Eternal Life. The allegory has not even novelty to recommend it, and is impalpable and tedious as most allegories are. On the other hand, we repeat, there are touches in the poem that remind us it is by a master’s hand. For instance, when Sir Gareth, Sir Lancelot, and Lynette, take shelter in a cavern, all about which ‘flies a honeysuckle,’ Lynette observes :

‘ Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle  
In the hushed night, as if the world were one  
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness !’

Three lines that contain a sweeter kernel than any three allegories, and might have been written by Shakspeare himself.

Of the second poem in the volume, *The Last Tournament*, we need not speak at large, for many of our readers must needs already be acquainted with it through its appearance in the *Contemporary Review*. It is vastly superior to *Gareth and Lynette*, and much more interesting, although the tone is sad, and it foreshadows the breaking up of Arthur’s reign, and paints the falseness of his noblest knights.

Arthur himself, indeed, is still bent on cleansing the land of oppressors, and his righteous wrath flames up within him as of old, when his poor churl staggers into the hall,

His visage ribbed  
From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals,  
and tells him of his maltreatment.

‘ Lord, I was tending swine, and the Red Knight  
Brake in upon me and drave them to his tower ;  
And when I called upon thy name as one  
That doest right by gentle and by churl,  
Maimed me and mauled, and would outright have  
slain,

Save that he sware me to a message, saying :  
“ Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I  
Have founded my Round Table in the North,  
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn,  
My knights have sworn the counter to it—and say  
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,  
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess  
To be none other than themselves—and say  
My knights are all adulterers like his own,  
But mine are truer, seeing they profess  
To be none other ; and say his hour is come,  
The heathen are upon him, his long lance  
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.”

With a hundred young and untried knights, the king rides forth to punish this rebel, while Lancelot holds a tournament for him at home. He reaches the marauder’s castle, before which one of his own Table Round is hanging dead upon a tree, and on the boughs the shield of the Red Knight,

Shewing a shower of blood in a field noir,  
And therebeside a horn,  
which Arthur winds.

Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn,  
That sent the face of all the marsh aloft  
An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud  
Of shriek and plume, the Red Knight heard, and all,  
Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm,  
In blood-red armour sallying, howled to the King:  
‘The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!  
Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King  
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world—  
The woman-worshipper? Yea, God’s curse, and I!  
Slain was the brother of my paramour  
By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine  
And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too,  
Swore by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,  
And stings itself to everlasting death,  
To hang whatever knight of thine I fought  
And tumbled. Art thou King?—Look to thy life!’

The combat is not long in doubt: the drunken creature, as he stretches to strike the king, falls of his own weight,

As the crest of some slow-arching wave,  
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,  
Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,  
From less and less to nothing; thus he fell.

And Arthur’s knights rush in, and slay his rabble rout, and burn his tower. But in the meantime there is treachery at home in trusted Lancelot; and Tristram, the impure, leaves his own Isolt, and rides westward to wanton with another Isolt, wife of hated Mark, the king of Cornwall: and what a picture of his dual mind, as he so rides, is this:

Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt  
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore  
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood  
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye  
For all that walked, or crept, or perched, or flew.  
Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown,  
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape  
Of one that in them sees himself, returned;  
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,  
Or even a fallen feather, vanished again.

He finds Isolt at Tintagil—her husband gone for three days’ hunting, as he said:

‘And so belike returns within an hour;  
Mark’s way, my soul!’

as she frankly tells her visitor, whom, notwithstanding this evident peril, she receives very literally with open arms. For

When she heard the feet of Tristram grind  
The spiring stone that scaled about her tower,  
Flushed, started, met him at the doors, and there  
Belted his body with her white embrace,  
Crying aloud: ‘Not Mark—not Mark, my soul!  
The footstep fluttered me at first: not he:  
Catlike through his own castle steals my Mark,  
But warrior-wise thou stridest through his halls.’

Their talk is excellently told, and reveals Tristram’s selfishness and Isolt’s passion in striking contrast. She blames him for his recent marriage, as falsehood to herself; and he defends it on the ground that it was the similarity of name that made him weak.

‘She loved me well.

Did I love her? The name at least I loved. . . .  
Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek,  
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God.’

Isolt, blinded by her love, does not perceive Tristram’s baseness in this speech, but is keen enough to discern it in her own case. For when, while dallying with her hand, he says:

‘May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray,  
And past desire!’

she answers passionately:

“May God be with thee, sweet, when thou art old,  
And sweet no more to me!” I need Him now.  
For when had Lancelot uttered aught so gross  
Even to the swineherd’s malkin in the mast?  
The greater man, the greater courtesy.  
But thou, through ever harrying thy wild beasts—  
Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance  
Becomes thee well—art grown wild beast thyself.  
How darest thou, if lover, push me even  
In fancy from thy side, and set me far  
In the gray distance, half a life away,  
Her to be loved no more? . . .  
Swear to me thou wilt love me even when old,  
Gray-haired, and past desire, and in despair.’

In his reply, Tristram taunts her with her own broken vow to Mark; then sneers at all such vows:

My soul, we love but while we may.

The whole scene is very powerful, and admirably exemplifies the bitterness and instability of illicit passion. In the end, they make up the quarrel, and he gives her the ruby necklace which he has just won as victor in the Tournament.

He rose, he turned, then, flinging round her neck,  
Claspt it, and cried: ‘Thine Order, O my Queen!’  
But, while he bowed to kiss the jewelled throat,  
Out of the dark, just as the lips had touched,  
Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek—  
‘Mark’s way,’ said Mark, and clove him through  
the brain.

*The Last Tournament* is, in short, a noble fragment, and with the rest upon the Arthurian theme—some better, some less fine—will make up a grand mosaic. We repeat, however, that we are far from sorry that the Laureate has given over such piece-work, and will henceforth devote his Muse to a less threadbare subject than Arthur and his Table Round.

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